



President's Message

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President, Hawaii Medical Association

Today, as individual physicians and as an organization, we are facing difficult times and must make difficult decisions. We can no longer shy away from controversial issues. Today, there are things we can no longer afford to do, and things we can no longer afford not to do. As a professional organization we must advocate for physicians, but first and foremost, we must serve and protect our patients.

On October 2, 1998, the HMSA held a special membership meeting for the purpose of changing its Constitution and Bylaws. These proposed amendments serve to disenfranchise the members of this mutual benefit society, a move of great concern because of the enormous influence exerted by this health plan behemoth. Because the HMA is dedicated to patient advocacy, your Executive Committee decided on two actions: 1) to oppose these amendments; and 2) to notify our membership of the significance of this meeting. Furthermore, the HMA joined forces with the Hawaii Coalition for Health and the Hawaii Federation of Physicians and Dentists to take a unified position, as all three organizations opposed these changes which would affect HMSA's 600,000 members on the basis of patient advocacy.

Unfortunately our efforts failed. The deck was stacked against us. There was only a minimal 10 day advance public notice for the

meeting. The meeting was scheduled for a busy Monday morning, the eve of the general election. After the meeting, HMSA's spokesman admitted that: 1) the HMSA contacted only certain employer groups and; 2) an exceptionally large number of paid HMSA employees, "as many as 200 staff members might have attended to assist in the meeting" (Honolulu Star Bulletin 11/3/98). Attempts were made to discredit the HMA and the Coalition by declaring that our efforts were motivated by political self-interest.....a time honored tactic of drawing attention away from the issues when the issues have little merit. Indeed, if any organization could be accused of self-interest, it was not us.

We are appreciative of the large amount of feedback we received from membership, most in support of our actions. However, we did receive criticism from three physicians, one who serves on the HMSA Board of Directors and another who is conflicted because he is a board member of a corporation involved in a joint venture with HMSA. These isolated comments were far outweighed by the numerous letters, faxes, and phone calls we received encouraging us to continue opposition to the amendments.

It is important to say here that this year the HMA will continue to tackle tough and controversial issues, and we will continue to take a proactive position in areas of patient advocacy. For, if we fail to do so, we will lose our *raison d'être* and the trust our patients place in us to work for their best interests.

I would encourage every member who is interested, to get involved with this and other issues, by coming to the Executive Committee meetings held weekly or the Council meetings held monthly. Your officers and commissioners are volunteers and "regular" doctors just like you. What you as an individual member can derive as a benefit of membership is directly related to what efforts you contribute toward our association. HMA's ultimate success is truly a result of the collective efforts of individual members. At minimum, please call or fax your comments to us.



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